DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 372 724 HE 027 679

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TITLE Socialization Outcomes of Part Time Graduate Professional Social Work Education: A Comparison of Adult Students in Career Transition to Social Work with Returning Adult Students Who Have Undergraduate Training and Practical Experience in Social Work.
PUB DATE [90]
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Students; *Career Change; Career Development; College Outcomes Assessment; *Graduate Study; Higher Education; Masters Programs; Professional Development; *Reentry Students; *Socialization; *Social Work; Student Attitudes; *Student Characteristics; Student Development; Values

ABSTRACT

This study compared professional socialization outcomes in two groups of adult students in part time Masters of Social Work programs, 44 with an undergraduate degree in social work and at least 1 year of relevant work experience, and 26 with undergraduate degrees and work experience in other fields. Subjects were given three measures of attitudes and values at three times during the program: (1) at the beginning or early in the program, (2) about halfway through the program, and (3) during the professional practicum. No significant differences were found between the groups. Results are interpreted in terms of concepts of professional socialization including the concept of changes occurring during the stages of socialization, the concept of re-socialization versus socialization, and the concept of "role-aging". Tables detail the study's results. (Contains 17 references.) (DB)

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Socialization Outcomes of Part time Graduate Professional Social Work Education: A Comparison of Adult Students in Career Transition to Social Work with Returning Adult Students who have Undergraduate Training and Practical Experience in Social Work

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

SOCIALIZATION OUTCOMES OF PART TIME GRADUATE PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION: A COMPARISON OF ADULT STUDENTS IN CAREER TRANSITION TO SOCIAL WORK WITH RETURNING ADULT STUDENTS WHO HAVE UNDERGRADUATE TRAINING AND PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE IN SOCIAL WORK.

ABSTRACT

The 1980's and the first half of the 1990's have seen significant changes in program delivery, in graduate professional education. These changes include an emphasis on educational outcomes, inclusion of non-traditional students caused by economic and social changes, and a proliferation of non-traditional graduate professional programs to meet these demands.

Adults pursuing part time graduate education represent more than half of all graduate school enrollments. Most of these students are enrolled in professional education programs. This trend is likely to continue.

Some professions, such as social work, while offering part time graduate programs, are still in conflict about the ability of these programs to produce graduates, and practicing professionals that are the equal of their full time programs.

The social work profession's concern centers on the part time Master of Social Work program's ability to instill in the student the profession's relevant value system. Adding to the conflict over full time versus part time study is whether graduate social work study should be limited to those students who have undergraduate degrees in social work. The argument for "graduate only" study is that socialization that is not completed in the undergraduate years will be completed during study for the Master of Social Work degree. That the values and attitudes of the profession are so important to the practicing professional that part time study for the career transitioner does not provide sufficient time to acquire them.

This study is unique because it looked at two groups of adult students in part time programs, in similar on-campus part time program models, while controlling for the impact of variables of undergraduate training and professional experience. The foci of this study are the socialization outcomes of part time Master of Social Work programs, specifically the internalization of professional values, as a case of the broader question of socialization outcomes of part time graduate professional education.

The instrument used for data collection had been used with previous social work populations, and its validity was established for this population. Statistical analysis suggests that there was no significant difference between adults in career transition to social work, and those adults with undergraduate training and professional experience in social work. The study does suggest changes that occur to individuals, over the course of graduate professional study, and ways in which program delivery could be improved.

INTRODUCTION

The average age of the student attending college is increasing. This is occurring as more individuals change jobs and careers and go back to college to acquire the necessary skills to make the transition. As the age of the student increases the opportunity to attend college on full time basis decreases due to other responsibilities (e.g., family, work, etc.). The number of part time enrollments in 1989 was forty-four percent (Adult and Continuing Education Today,
1989). The increase in part time students is also reflected in graduate school enrollments. Recent data indicate that fifty-four percent of graduate enrollments were part time (National University Continuing Education News, 1989). The majority of these students are women, enrolled in professional education programs.

One of the goals of graduate professional education is the development of professional identity, by instilling the profession's relevant value system in each student. Many times the ability to achieve this socialization outcome in part time graduate professional education programs is questioned. This is particularly true in professions, such as social work, where professional values play such a critical role in the development of the professional personality.
Advocates of full time study argue that part time study does not allow time for the complete immersion in the scholarly environment that is necessary for internalization of professional values to occur (Richman and Rosenfeld, 1988).

Socialization is the process by which a person, who aspires to belong to a certain group (the reference group), acquires the values, attitudes, behaviors, and acceptance of that group. It is a continuous process, a learning process, and a social process (Bragg, 1976). Socialization occurs in combination with both social interaction and psychological internalization. The neophyte professional has access to social interaction through contact with other would-be professional, faculty, and practicing professional. Psychological internalization occurs when the person begins to assume the values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs, of the reference group.

Individuals following a course of professional education from pre-service training , to entrance into the profession, returning for graduate professional study, will experience a continuation and reinforcement of the socialization process. However, this continuation of the socialization process may not be as smooth for the person making a career transition. These people are making a deliberate attempt to join a new reference group, and need to acquire new values and attitudes as well as skills. This is important when a person may be changing from a career where individualism is primary, to a career where group efforts are encouraged.

The purpose of this study was to determine if adults in career transition, in these part time Master of Social Work programs, could internalize the relevant value system as well as the adults continuing their social work education.

METHODOLOGY

This portion of the article will familiarize the reader with the data collection, the population, instrumentation, data analysis, and instrument validity and reliability.

Data Collection

The design for this study employed a method whereby data were collected at three different stages in the Master of Social Work degree process. Students were selected from three different reference points in the Master of Social Work program. These reference points were: (a) The beginning of the degree program to no more than 24 credits completed; (b) The completion of twenty-seven to thirty-six credits (comparable for full-time students to the end of their first year to the beginning of their second year); (c) During the professional practicum. These reference points were selected based on findings of Richman and Rosenfeld (1988), who noted changes in students' values and attitudes towards the profession at various points in the graduate education process.

Some demographic data were collected to describe and delineate subgroups of the population. Other demographic data were collected that were determined to have an influence on the internalization of selected values. These independent variables include: ethnic background, religious preference, socioeconomic status, sex, marital status, and age. These variables were controlled for in the data analysis.

Population

The population for this study consisted of adult Master of Social Work (MSW) students, pursuing their degree on a part time basis. For the purposes of this study "part time, adult student" was defined as an individual who had returned to graduate school after at least one year of separation from undergraduate study, and was carrying less than nine credits.

The population was divided into two groups, based on undergraduate degree and work experience. One group would have an undergraduate degree in social work and at least one year of work experience in a social work setting. The other group would have an undergraduate degree, and work experience in something other than social work. This group would be making a career transition to social work.

All participating students were studying in similar on-campus, part time programs. Institutions represented various categories in Boyer's classification system of higher education institutions (1987).

Instrumentation

Three different scales were used for data collection. Each scale has been used extensively with social work populations, in order to study socialization outcomes of social work education. The validity of the scales were established through expert, and item analysis. Reliability was established for this particular population.

The Social Values Test (McLeod & Meyer, 1967) consists of forty statements, identifying ten different value orientations significant to the social work profession, with four value positions per orientation. The second scale that was used in this study was the Ascription of Responsibility for Another's Welfare Attitude Survey (Schwartz, 1968). The survey is composed of twenty-four opinion-type statements, that elicit responses concerned with affixing responsibility for actions. The final scale employed was the

Socially Responsible Personality Scale (Berkowitz & Lutterman, 1968). The scale is composed of eight statements
concerned with taking responsibility for actions committed. This scale can also help determine
integration into the reference group.

Data Analysis

The dependent variables were undergraduate training, and professional experience. Data were using descriptive statistics, multiple regression, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Multiple regression allows for the control of more than one independent variable. ANOVA is used to compare the means of two group. The independent variables used in the regression equation were based on substantial theory and expectation.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this study was to investigate and compare the socialization outcomes, specifically, the internalization of the relevant value system of the social work profession, in part time programs. The study was unique because of the dependent variables, which were undergraduate education and work experience.

The population of the study consisted of 134 participants. Table 1 provides an overall view of the study population, based on demographic data collected from the participants. Data are reported separately for students at each stage of program completion. These variables also represent the variables used in the regression analysis. Two demographic variables not reported in Table 1 are age and years of experience. The mean age at stage one of program completion is 31.83. At stage two the mean age is 34.54, and at stage three the mean age is 38.33. The mean for years of work experience is 2.8 years.

Table 1 shows the frequency distributions of the demographic data. Most notable is the reduced number of participants from stage one of program completion to stage three of program completion. This reduction is reflected in both groups. Also notable is the large number of females represented in the population. Research would support the finding that the majority of returning students are female (Adult Continuing Education Today, 1989; National University Continuing Education Association News, 1989). It can be noted that at each stage on program completion the mean age of the participants increased. Finally, it should be noted that the majority of students belong to an organized religion.

Table 2 shows the mean scores of the entire population, on each portion of the instrument, along with the total score at each stage of program completion. Also shown is the standard deviation for each portion of the instrument, at each stage of program completion.

Table 2 shows that at stage two of program completion there is a decline in scores in all portions of the instrument and in total scores. This consistent with what is presented in theory, and the individual's initial contact with the "realities" of the profession (Bragg,

Table 1

Demographic Data by Stage of Program completion

	Stage 1 (N=70)		Stage 2(N=37)		Stage 3(N=27)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Continuing	44	63	19	51	12	44
Transition	26	37	18	49	15	56
Foreign Father	5	7	6	17	3	11
Native Father	65	93	30	83	24	89
Foreign Mother	5	7	5	14	5	19
Native Mother	65	93	32	86	22	81
Income						
10-20K	16	23	10	27	3	11
21-30K	25	36	11	30	3	11
31-40K	14	20	11	30	11	41
41-50K	7	10	3	8	4	15
Over 50K	8	11	2	5	6	22
Marital Status						
Never Married	31	44	13	35	3	11
Married	28	40	15	40	20	74
Divorced	7	10	4	11	3	11
Separated	3	4	4	11	1	4
Widowed	1	1	1	1	0	0
Religious Preference						
Jewish	13	19	6	16	4	15
Catholic	20	29	13	35	6	22
Potestant	28	40	7	19	10	37
Other	7	10	5	14	5	19
None	2	3	6	16	2	7
Sex						
Male	14	20	11	30	9	33
Female	56	80	26	70	18	67

Table 2

Mean Scores, and Standard Deviations by Stage of Program Completion

	Stage 1 (N=70)		Stage 2 (N=37)		Stage 3 (N=27)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Ascription of Responsibility	15.69	3.70	14.86	3.82	15.63	3.91
Social Values Test	47.61	9.62	44.78	8.50	47.60	10.23
Socially Responsible Personality	6.29	1.45	5.27	1.63	5.96	2.05
Total Score	69.59	11.33	64.92	10.82	69.19	12.00

Table 3

Means Comparison by Stage of Program Completion

	Stage 1 (N=70)		Stage 2 (N=37)		Stage 3 (N=27)	
	Unadj.	Adj.	Unadj.	Adj.	Unadj.	Adj.
Ascription of Responsibility						
Continuing	15.55	14.50	13.58	12.87	16.50	17.96
Transition	15.92	15.27	16.22	15.24	14.93	16.66
C-T	-.37	-.77	* -2.64	-2.17	+1.57	+1.30
Social Values						
Continuing	47.16	54.25	41.42	39.42	49.08	47.70
Transition	48.38	54.51	48.38	43.96	46.40	43.30
C-T	-1.22	-.26	* -6.91	-4.54	+2.68	+4.40
Socially Responsible Personality						
Continuing	6.30	5.00	4.58	5.35	6.59	5.70
Transition	6.27	5.14	6.00	6.34	5.47	5.19
C-T	+.03	-.14	* -1.42	-.99	+1.12	+.51
Total						
Continuing	69.00	73.75	59.58	57.63	72.17	71.34
Transition	70.57	74.93	70.56	65.53	66.80	65.11
C-T	-1.57	-1.18	* -10.98	-7.90	+5.37	+6.23

Unadjusted mean.

Regression adjusted mean for sex, religious preference, mother's ethnic origin, father's ethnic origin, income.

*p is less than or equal to .05

1976; Richman & Rosenfeld, 1988). The rebound in the scores is also consistent with the concept of integration of theory and practice.

Table 3 shows the unadjusted (prior to regression), adjusted (after inclusion of the variables), and mean differences at each stage of program completion. The adjusted scores are the focus here. It is evident that those adults in career transition score higher at the completion of both stages one and two of the Master of Social Work program. This, however, is not the case at stage three of program completion. Those continuing their social work education score higher. This is important, and will be discussed in further detail in the next section of the paper.

There are other elements of Table 3 that should be mentioned. The Social Values Test (McLeod & Meyer, 1967) accounts for the greatest amount of variation between the groups. This may be due to the number of value dimensions it measures. Finally, stage two scores show a general reduction in scores for both groups.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was hypothesized that no significant differences would occur between adults in career transition and adults continuing their social work education. The results showed that career transition adults, in the participating part time Master of Social Work programs, could internalize the relevant value system similar to their counterparts, who were continuing their social work education. The null hypothesis could not be rejected.

This is important because it suggests that it is possible for adults to make a career transition to a disparate profession, study for the profession in a non-traditional program, and be able to internalize the relevant values and attitudes of the profession. This has relevance for
students, faculty, program planners, and professions.

The results also point out places where program improvement could be made. This is particularly true in the final stage of program completion, but reflects upon improvements that could be made throughout the program. Specifically, the lower scores achieved by adults in career transition may be associated with three phenomenon occurring simultaneously, within the environment of the professional practicum. The phenomenon are: The changes that occur during the stages of socialization, as discussed by Richman and Rosenfeld (1988); the concept of re-socialization versus socialization, as discussed by Brim and Wheeler (1966), and the concept of "role-aging", as discussed by Bragg (1976). Each will be discussed.

Stages of Socialization

It is undeniable that those adult students, who are continuing their social work education, already have a firm foundation of socializing experience. Therefore, these students may not require the same kind or level of institutional support, both formal and informal, that those adults in career transition may require. These formal and informal support systems(e.g., faculty interaction, peer interaction, etc.) and may not be available to any part time students, but their absence may affect those in career transition much more. Richman and Rosenfeld (1988) state the initial stage of socialization is an "idealistic" stage, in regard to expectations about the career. Both groups of part time

students enter graduate professional education with high expectations, and are getting used to graduate education, and, perhaps, a new institution. Both groups are on a relative equal footing. This is illustrated by the small variation in scores in the first stage of program completion. At the second stage of socialization, the "realistic' stage, students begin to consider what the profession is actually like, and what it will be like to be a member of the profession (e.g., variety of clients that need help; perhaps, starting at the bottom of the career ladder).

It is the third stage of program completion, when the individual must integrate theory and practice, that the support system may be critical to the successful navigation of this situation. Individuals who are in career transition must not only integrate theory and practice, but are faced with the demands of a new work-setting. Individuals, who are continuing their education, are familiar with the social work organization. The adult students in career transition may need more time and support to integrate theory and practice, and develop their new professional identity. Although, the differences in the scores were not that great, it took work-place familiarity to make those differences occur. Work-place familiarity and its impact on the socialization process is supported by Salmon and Walker's 1981 study. They found that part time social work students did better academically than their full time counterparts because part time stuents were, as one of the requirements of the part time program, employed as social workers.

Adult Socialization

It is usual to think of graduate schools as places of developmental socialization. That is, where the formal purpose of the organization is further socialization (Brim & Wheeler, 1966). Due to career transition, however, graduate professional school may take on the characteristics of something other than developmental socialization. It is here that it becomes necessary to talk about the concept of re-socialization (Brim & Wheeler, 1966).

Brim and Wheeler (1966) discuss the importance of the organization as a agent of socialization. In this case it is the academic department and the social work organization acting a model and a clarifier of the goals for the students. In the case of adults, who are in career transition, the socializing agents may not be meeting the needs of its students. What is really happening is re-socialization to a new life-style. At the final stage of socialization, when faced with the realities of the profession, practicing a new role, and integrating theory and practice, the student in career transition is having the agents of socialization correct deficiencies in beliefs and attitudes (from a professional social work perspective). To the point where the adult student begins the practicum, there has only been theory. The practicum immerses the student in some of the realities of the profession. This re-socialization actually takes on more of the characteristics of childhood socialization, rather than adult socialization (Brim & Wheeler, 1966). the adults in career transition may experience a radical shift in their existing belief system. The career change requires that the individual experience basic changes, in order for the new belief system to be internalized. Unlike adult socialization, which
is continuous and an aggregate of previous experience (Bragg, 1976; Brim & Wheeler, 1966).

Role-Aging

The practicum is an experience that allows the student to integrate theory and practice, and mature into their new professional role. The person evolves from learner to practicer, gains a sense of identity and competence. The practicum is the final step for the transition to the new professional role. The adult, who is in career transition may not be as sure of the new role. The career transitioner may need more time and support for this role aging to occur. This may not be the case for the person continuing their education.

Recommendations

There are several issues that arise, as a result of this study. These issues could serve as the basis for further study, and could be used to enhance current practice. These issues include: differential attrition; socializing agents in graduate professional education; career transitioners in practice; and re-socialization versus socialization in graduate professional education.

The results of the study imply that there may other factors at work that affect the success of a program (i.e., support system). The results also imply that traditional concepts of socialization may not be applicable in this situation.

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